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Reviewing Stand

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Are We Winning the War of Words?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System planned in conjunction with the fifth in a series of six academic conferences being conducted by Northwestern University during its Centennial

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Are We Winning the War of Words?

MR. MCBURNEY: Our speakers today include Edward W. Barrett, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs. Barrett, what does your post involve in the State Department?

MR. BARRETT: It involves general supervision of our entire United States Government's information program. This includes the Voice of America and a great many other things. It includes advising the Secretary of State on public relations problems here and abroad, and it includes certain work in connection with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and finally, a great many operations concerned with maintaining contact between the Department of State and the American people.

MR. MCBURNEY: We are also glad to welcome to this Northwestern University Reviewing Stand, David Nichol, Foreign Correspondent, the *Chicago Daily News*. Nichol, what has been your contact with our information program?

'Berlin a Focal Point'

MR. NICHOL: I spent a good deal of the time since the war in central Europe, most of it in Germany, and particularly in Berlin. Berlin is a focal point in this question of the story of America as against that of the Soviet Union.

MR. MCBURNEY: You have been able to see some of the results of this program Barrett represents, at first hand?

MR. NICHOL: Yes, and to talk with the people who come out of the Iron Curtain countries and tell us what happens there.

MR. BARRETT: Yes, I would say Berlin is enormously important, because it is an island behind the Iron Curtain, really.

MR. NICHOL: It's the only place that we can get in behind the Iron Curtain successfully, I think.

MR. MCBURNEY: Are you going back to Germany?

MR. NICHOL: Yes, I'll be going back in November.

MR. MCBURNEY: Also on this Reviewing Stand broadcast we have Professor Donley F. Feddersen, Chairman of the Department of Radio and Television, Northwestern University, and member of a special committee advising the Voice of America.

We have already had several references to the Voice of America. What is that program, Feddersen?

World-wide Network

MR. FEDDERSEN: Barrett is probably better able to answer that than I am, but as I have seen it, it is a world-wide network broadcasting in nearly fifty languages over seventy-five transmitters throughout the world. It is financed by United States Government funds, from the State Department, and it speaks for the United States Government and the American people.

MR. MCBURNEY: Do those broadcasts emanate from this country?

MR. FEDDERSEN: Many of them do. Most of them, I should say at this point, although there are moves afoot to regionalize the output to carry some of the programming to local areas overseas.

MR. MCBURNEY: In this country we have heard a great deal recently about Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia. How are these programs related to the Voice of America?

MR. FEDDERSEN: Radio Free Europe is an enterprise of private citizens in the United States. It concentrates on captive countries behind the Iron Curtain — Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and so forth — and it is largely financed, as I said, through individual contributions.

It differs chiefly in this respect, that it can be a citizen's station for

the people of Czechoslovakia, for example. Czechs who have come out from behind the Iron Curtain can speak via those facilities to Czechs who are still behind the Iron Curtain. Of course, Radio Free Europe has the freedom to allow people to speak back to their own people much more than the Voice of America, which is really an instrument of American policy.

MR. BARRETT: Yes, basically, the Voice of America speaks as "we Americans speaking to you Poles," whereas, basically, Radio Free Europe speaks as "we Poles speaking to you Poles," or "you fellow Poles."

I'd like to emphasize, though, that Radio Free Europe is distinctively a free enterprise, and deserves the support of the people in this country. You see, the Russians are spending today between one and two billion dollars a year on propaganda. The combined expenditures of the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and all other American information operations total only about one hundred million dollars; therefore, you can see the need for putting all the resources we can into this battle.

Importance of Words

MR. MCBURNEY: That comparison suggests the need, but Barrett, how important are words in winning a war? We are talking about the question, "Are we winning the war of words?"

MR. BARRETT: I would say that words or ideas, if you will, are immensely important in winning the so-called cold war, because if we don't convince people on both sides of the Iron Curtain of the justice and the promise of our cause, and of the "phoniness" of the other man's, we are likely to find ourselves in a real shooting war.

MR. MCBURNEY: Is this war of words or ideas essentially a battle between Russian and American propaganda, Nichol? Is that the way you feel about it?

MR. NICHOL: I wouldn't think so. It is primarily a struggle between two systems. The one system of com-

plete totalitarian control is best exemplified, almost exclusively exemplified at the present time, by the Soviet Union. The other side of it is the free world, of which the United States is a major proponent at the present time, and we certainly hope it will continue to be an example of what freedom can do.

MR. FEDDERSEN: Barrett, doesn't this really dramatize one of the problems which the information service has? We speak, you say, for the American people; the Voice of America and other information services speak for the American people. Isn't it pretty easy to miss this point that Nichol has just made, and to give the impression that we are speaking solely in terms of America's self-interest, rather than in terms of the purposes of free peoples, and our identity with the common cause?

Free World Cause

MR. BARRETT: Yes, Feddersen; I'm glad you brought that one up. That is the very reason why we shifted emphasis very markedly in this program in the last year and a half.

We are not just trying to win friends for America. We are not just trying to win admirers. We are trying to win friends for the whole cause of freedom and justice — the whole free world cause. Accordingly, we are working increasingly with other organizations in a great international campaign of truth.

MR. NICHOL: I talked with a Russian officer who came over to Western Germany not long ago, and I asked him some questions about Voice of America and its effectiveness. His criticism at that time was that a man who is risking his life to listen to an outside radio is not much interested in hearing an "interesting story" of American book publishing, or a story of American household appliances. He said the one thing that is important is a hard-hitting message that will give people some hope — news, political comment, an indication of what is going on in the free world, in very short, concise form.

MR. FEDDERSEN: Barrett, isn't that

essentially what the Voice of America is doing?

MR. BARRETT: That is essentially what the Voice of America is doing. We have stepped up the proportion of our output — that is, hard, straight news, to begin with — and the proportion that is commentary. We still carry some material to Russia itself, not to most of the rest of the world, about the relative well-being of Americans, telling how many hours they have to work to get a pair of shoes, for instance — which is something like four hours, whereas a Russian has to work something like 45 hours — because we have found that type of story particularly effective behind the Iron Curtain. Many Russians who come out have told us it is effective.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you tell them about the number of bath tubs we have, and the number of automobiles we have, and so forth?

MR. BARRETT: To Russia, yes; to underdeveloped areas and most other countries of the world, no.

MR. McBURNEY: How would you sum up, tersely, the primary purposes of this information program?

Four Purposes

MR. BARRETT: I would sum it up in four main categories. The first purpose is to expose the phony, vicious really reactionary nature of Communist imperialism. The second is to instill in free peoples everywhere a desire to cooperate with us, and this we can do by showing up the lies that the Communists are telling about us, and by demonstrating that we are a decent people whose moral strength and physical strength can be counted on. The third purpose is to build behind the Iron Curtain every possible psychological obstacle to Kremlin aggression; and the fourth is to build up on this side of the Curtain, among all free peoples, a new spirit of unity and spunk and determination, a spirit to resist aggression at whatever cost.

MR. McBURNEY: In phrasing those four objectives, in each case you made reference to Russia. I take it, then, that we are directing our effort primarily against Russia and against

Russia's story and Russia's propaganda?

MR. BARRETT: We think the very critical situation that faces the world is the preservation of the free world from Russian aggression. Accordingly, we are putting maximum emphasis on that today.

MR. NICHOL: I would like to suggest at this point what seems to me a very important distinction we should always make. I think we feel that the peoples of Poland and Czechoslovakia and the various other countries within the Iron Curtain are our allies already. They know what freedom is because they have lost it, and I think they probably know more clearly what freedom is than some of the areas which still have it.

I do think we must always make clear that it is the government or the system under which these people are living which we oppose, and not the best interests of the people themselves. We are trying to help the people of Poland as much as we are trying to help the people of Germany, England, or any other country.

MR. BARRETT: I'm glad you brought that up, Nichol, because a cardinal point in this entire program must be a distinction between the peoples and their Communist governments. You notice that in summing up those four points I used the word "Kremlin" instead of "Russia" or "Russian" — for just that reason.

MR. McBURNEY: Is this story of ours getting across, Nichol? You have been in Europe, and are in a position to say what has happened there.

'Need for Improvement'

MR. NICHOL: Let me suggest this. We haven't been in this business very long, and we are still experimenting with ways of getting the story across. I would say that the story isn't across yet; there is a very great deal that has to be done, and improvements will have to be made constantly.

I would like to point out that Feddersen spoke of regionalization of the output. My own experience has been that the most effective operation we have in this war of ideas is the radio station which is operated in Berlin

through the office of the High Commissioner and the State Department there. The important thing in connection with this radio station, which is called RIAS (Radio in American Sector), is that the work, the thinking, are almost entirely done by Germans, and that the American supervision is limited to four or five men.

MR. FEDDERSEN: RIAS is not a Voice of America station. As you pointed out, it is a station that is operated largely by Germans.

MR. MCBURNEY: We own it?

MR. BARRETT: Oh, yes; it is integrated with the Voice of America program.

Popularity of RIAS

MR. FEDDERSEN: The Voice of America carries some programs on it.

A survey I saw recently from your program evaluation bureau pointed out two things of major interest, first, that RIAS is one of the most popular stations, not just in our zone in Berlin but in the whole Eastern zone of Germany, and that by long odds it outstrips all competition; and secondly, that one of the Voice of America programs which it relays for you is, I think, the second most-listened-to program in that area.

MR. BARRETT: Yes, there is no question that RIAS has proved one of the most effective instruments we have, and it is because of that experience that we are transferring some of our own Voice of America operations to points overseas nearer the Iron Curtain. For example, we are starting this month, I believe, broadcasting from Munich to Iron Curtain areas.

MR. MCBURNEY: You said a minute ago, Nichol — or suggested a minute ago — that we have friends behind the Iron Curtain. Does that mean that this story we are telling via this German station you have been discussing — and our Voice of America programs — is getting into the Iron Curtain countries?

MR. NICHOL: I would put it this way: The people are our friends because we stand for freedom, which they don't enjoy at the present time. We stand for getting the Russians off their backs, where they are at the

present time. To these people our story is a very simple one, just to "Keep your hopes up," that "Some day it's going to be better."

MR. BARRETT: Yes, the story that "We're still with you; we haven't forgotten you. Keep up your spirit of resistance. Don't go in for active resistance now, but keep up your spirit of resistance."

'Know What Communism Means'

MR. FEDDERSEN: Of course, I think it is important, too, to add this comment, that it is much easier to reach those people with our story because these people, by personal experience, know what Communism means. We have quite a different problem in certain other areas where Communism is an abstract idea—pretty much as democracy is an abstract idea—where you have two abstractions fighting for predominance.

MR. BARRETT: Yes, I think Nichol could tell you that the nearer people are to the Iron Curtain, by and large, the more hatred they have for the Kremlin's system, the more fear they have for it.

MR. NICHOL: Certainly, that is true. I think in Berlin we have the feeling that the Berliners are our most effective allies in Germany, and that our second most effective allies are the Eastern Germans who live in the Soviet zone, and that the people who are still questionable in their attitude toward us are the Western Germans in the areas that we occupy.

MR. MCBURNEY: Don't the Russians have a more exciting story to tell than we have? They couch their story, at least, in terms of freedom, in terms of breaking the shackles, in terms of revolution. Does that story get over in a way that ours doesn't, Feddersen?

MR. FEDDERSEN: Of course, you raise a very crucial point here. The difference between a negative approach to information and a positive approach to information is at stake, it seems to me. If our effort is solely confined to denying the Russian promises, I don't think we shall get very far, which is one of the reasons why I was impressed recently when I heard one of our people on the Voice, I think, tell about a program which

had recently been developed, called "The Permanent Revolution." To my way of thinking, this symbolizes a way of presenting the democratic idea in a positive and dynamic way that will appeal to the target audience, an audience that does not care to look forward to a future that is completely bereft of the hope of changing its situation, and which might be easy game for a Russian promise of "pie in the sky."

'The Permanent Revolution'

MR. McBURNEY: In what sense is the democratic hope identified with "The Permanent Revolution"?

MR. FEDDERSEN: Simply in the sense that, as Barrett has pointed out here, the Kremlin story is essentially a reactionary one in the sense that once the status quo is established, there it is; it is the status quo, and it may be expected to stay that way, whereas the democratic story, as exemplified by American history and the histories of all democratic peoples has been one of gradual evolution. The so-called "Permanent Revolution" is really the achieving of social ideas and social action through peaceful means rather than by simply going in and throwing out the "haves" and putting in the "have-nots."

MR. NICHOL: I think we should be careful in our discussion about revolution to point out that we are not at the moment preaching revolution in any sense to the people of Eastern Europe, to the people who live within this Russian area of control. I take it that what you mean is that we are trying to point out to the people of Western Europe that they can achieve the things which Communism promises but doesn't deliver.

MR. FEDDERSEN: Yes—that we have at least an equivalent for social change, and that our equivalent is really what we know as social evolution, an evolution which has been going on in this country, with the consent of the governed, for lo! these many years.

MR. BARRETT: Yes, I would say it is a great deal more than equivalent to social change. You really are implying that the progress we have been making in this country—and that

other free countries have been making for the last 150 years or more, really much more—is the most revolutionary trend that this world has ever seen. It's a dynamic thing, and that is the story we are trying to tell increasingly.

Importance of Story

MR. McBURNEY: I should think it would be a matter of considerable importance that this story be told vitally and dynamically, because you are directing your program, as I understand it, to a good many people who haven't a great deal to look forward to as things are now.

MR. BARRETT: That is right.

MR. McBURNEY: And to the degree that we get ourselves identified with the status quo in some of those countries, we might be telling a story of despair.

MR. FEDDERSEN: Well, yes, I would agree with that. And, of course, at the same time, this is a campaign of truth that we are waging. We cannot match the Russian promises of "pie in the sky" and washing machines and refrigerators, and still remain honest and credible. However, we can say that freedom is the way that the individual can do these things, that in a free country he is permitted the opportunity to work out his destiny under circumstances which at least permit him to change his status.

MR. BARRETT: And how it offers him the greatest hope over the long run for justice and his own welfare.

MR. FEDDERSEN: Exactly.

MR. NICHOL: I think at this point we should be quite sure that we are not identifying the best interests of everybody else with our own selfish interests as Americans. We must point out to them that the system under which America has achieved greatness is the system which offers Frenchmen an opportunity to achieve greatness as Frenchmen.

MR. FEDDERSEN: Nichol, I'm glad you brought that up. One of the most encouraging things I have found since I have been working with the Voice

of America is the rather highly developed program of evaluation service which they have. Some of the researches which they are doing on communications habits in various countries, and on the needs and interests of people in the various areas—which are, as you point out, quite rightly, different from our own—are providing our information service with an invaluable tool, one as you say, Barrett, for actually talking to people in terms of where they are going and where they want to go.

MR. BARRETT: That is correct. One of the most important things we are doing today is making groups in the countries concerned on this side of the Iron Curtain sit down and listen to the Voice of America, giving us their criticisms and comments, filling out questionnaires. In the case of countries behind the Iron Curtain, we are taking persons who have recently escaped and forming them into panels, getting them to sit down daily to listen to the Voice, and then giving their criticisms and their suggestions.

Methods and Materials

MR. McBURNEY: That begins to give us some of the facets of this program of information we are discussing, Barrett. Can you give us a broader picture of it? What methods and materials do we use? We have mentioned the radio, of course.

MR. BARRETT: Well, Dean McBurney, I could speak for 45 minutes on that, but I imagine you prefer my 45-second version.

We have radio, which uses 75 transmitters and reaches about half the radio set owners behind the Iron Curtain and about two million people a day in France; a recent survey showed it brings in 33,000 letters a month, and so on.

We have films which reach an audience of approximately 400,000,000 a year. We have press publications, pamphlets, posters that are put up by ourselves and by cooperating organizations abroad. There are the 100-odd information centers which are, in a sense, serving as arsenals of ideas for those who are fighting for the cause of freedom.

We have the exchange-of-persons

program, which to my way of thinking is one of the most important of all programs. We find that about 97 per cent of the leaders who are brought to this country and given a chance to see this country for themselves—the good along with the bad—somehow go back sold on our decency, our honesty, our determination to make progress and our physical and moral strength.

Contributing Factors

MR. NICHOL: I would like to point out simply that we must be very careful not to consider this information program as a thing in itself. There has been a very great increase in confidence in Europe in the last twelve months or so. Some of it, no doubt, is due to the Voice of America, or to the information programs. A good deal of it is also due to the arrival of General Eisenhower. A lot of it is due to the arrival of American divisions with full equipment; it gives people great heart to see this evidence that the free world is not only talking but building and getting ready.

MR. BARRETT: I'm very glad Nichol brought up that point, because words alone are not worth a great deal in the so-called war of ideas. Actions alone, unless they are well publicized, are not worth a great deal. Eisenhower's arrival was a tremendous shot in the arm for Europe. That became much more a shot in the arm when it was well publicized, when the true meaning of it was told, when the story of "Ike" Eisenhower as an individual—a humanitarian as well as a military leader—was told by films and radio, et cetera. And the Communists' efforts to smear him were rebutted when the simple quotations of the things that Stalin had said about Eisenhower five years ago were used.

MR. McBURNEY: Now we raise the question, "Are we winning the war of words?" I should like to direct to you again, Nichol, this question: In your judgment, is this war of words we have been describing here going over?

MR. NICHOL: I would say we are making slow and very painful progress, but we are making progress.

The spirit of the West is building steadily, not nearly as rapidly as we had hoped, and with many delays and many heartbreaks along the road, but I think we are making progress.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you think people are really listening to these broadcasts or reading these pamphlets or getting this story?

MR. BARRETT: It is much broader than that. It is through these broadcasts and through these pamphlets and the activities of many forces in the countries concerned that the story is getting across, but I would like to agree with Nichol that it is not getting across as fast as I would like to see it.

But Americans are absurd when they say we are losing the war of words. Let's remember that the Communists, who put on the greatest propaganda effort the world has ever seen in their own satellite states, have failed dismally at it. The vast majority of the people of the satellites are with us, and not with the Kremlin today. The Communist party has lost strength in every country in Western Europe during the last four years, although there was one little setback in Italy. The spirit of resistance, of spunk and determination that Mr. Nichol mentioned, is increasingly evident in Europe.

'Need Facilities'

MR. FEDDERSEN: I would like to point out, too—while we are talking about the success in getting our story across in the various areas of the world—that our information service is, as you pointed out, relatively a new thing, and that our facilities for carrying on this kind of campaign are rather small compared to the facilities of the opposition. Russia has as many transmitters attempting to jam our broadcasts into Soviet Russia as the Voice of America has in all. We need the addition of a ring of facilities around the world in order to be able to get the broadcast message to the target audiences. There are still some audiences we do not reach with the kind of signals we would like to get in there.

MR. McBURNEY: Are you suggesting that the Communists have more

facilities in this area, are giving more to it than we give it?

MR. BARRETT: Oh, very, very definitely. That is the reason we are going back to Congress in the very near future, I hope, to ask for funds for the sort of facilities that Mr. Feddersen has mentioned.

MR. McBURNEY: How do the Russians try to combat our program of information?

Soviet Resistance

MR. BARRETT: Well, to begin with, they shut out virtually all publications and similar materials from the entire Iron Curtain area. They make it very dangerous to listen to the free world radios, and, finally, they put on the most massive effort to jam us out that the world has ever seen.

MR. McBURNEY: How do you "jam out" a program?

MR. BARRETT: You put another transmitter on a program that has the same wave length—let's say a Voice of America transmitter—that just makes squeaking noises or clacking noises, in order to prevent the Voice of America program from being heard.

We are now facing approximately 1,200 Soviet jammers. That is important, and that is one reason why we are asking for these increased facilities.

We find from a survey made by a lot of top scientists in this country that it costs the Russians approximately five to one in terms of dollars and in terms of manpower to jam out an American station. If we put up the right kind of stations, our expenditures are going to have to be matched, five to one, by the Russians, if they want to keep us out, and I think you will agree they'll make every effort to keep us out, won't they?

MR. NICHOL: Yes, they certainly would.

MR. McBURNEY: Do we do any jamming of Russian stations?

MR. BARRETT: No, we don't. We do not believe . . .

ANNOUNCER: I am sorry to interrupt, but our time is up.

Suggested Reading



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and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
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INKELES, ALEX. *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia; a Study in Mass Persuasion*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950.

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Broadcasting p. 83, June 4, '51. "World Set Count."

Summary of statistics compiled by UNESCO on the 163 million radio receivers in 128 countries and territories.

Changing Times 5:24-28, May, '51. "One Voice that Stalin Hates."

Day and night, U.S. broadcasts pour into the Soviet Union. This article tells how it is done and why we know it is effective.

Colliers 128:82, July 7, '51. "Louder and Clearer."

Discussion of the financial problems of the Voice of America with recommendations for an increased, not decreased, budget.

Columbia Journal of International affairs p. 44-55, Spring, '51. "The Soviet Characterization of the Voice of America." A. INKELES.

A research associate of the Harvard Russian Research Center describes Communist efforts to discredit the Voice of America in the eyes of the Russian people.

New York Times Magazine p. 7, June 24, '51. "We Can Get Through the Iron Curtain." B. McMAHON.

A Democratic Senator from Connecticut makes specific suggestions for reaching more people in the Soviet Union with an effective U.S. "truth campaign."

Newsweek 38:25-6, Sept. 17, '51. "Radio Free Europe."

There is good reason for the Reds to hate Radio Free Europe and this unusual report tells why.

Saturday Review of Literature 34:7-8, Feb. 3, '51 "Europe and the Voice of America." R.L. SHAYON.

A description of the activities of the Voice of America, the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation of Boston and Radio Free Europe, with an appeal for a drastic increase in funds and unified support of the VOA.

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U.S. Department of State Bulletin V. 23, p. 103-106, July 17, '50. "Forging a Free World with a Truth Campaign."

U.S. Department of State Bulletin 24:370-4, Mar. 5, '51. "Our Answer to the Big Lie." W. C. JOHNSTONE, Jr.

The Director of the Office of Educational Exchange in the U.S. lists samples of Soviet propaganda, our problems in combating them, the importance of targeting, or of placing our emphasis in critical spots, and the use of truth as a weapon.

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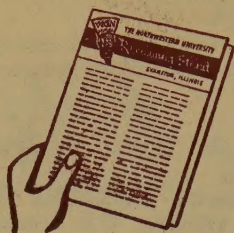
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A radio discussion of Senate Resolutions 243, calling for a Marshall Plan in the field of ideas.

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The growth in America's propaganda efforts, present inadequacies, and the opportunity for a practical program to counteract Soviet influence in the Philippines.



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